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ABSTRACT

The Ontario (Canada) Ministry of Education developed a six-stage evaluation model for local school districts that emphasized the values of involvement, communications, self-evaluation, cooperation, comprehensiveness, continuity, and coordination. The model includes the four components of people, purposes, programs, and products. The initiation and formal request stage incorporates inquiry, exploration, tentative commitment, and letters of agreement between the local school board and the ministry of education. The internal evaluation stage uses system review guides; role review guides for trustees, administrators, and teachers; program review guides organized under objectives, course design, teaching strategies, resources and materials, facilities, staff development, and evaluation processes and procedures. The external evaluation stage assesses the validity of the conclusions drawn by the internal team. The cooperative review stage is a meeting to produce understanding of all areas of agreement and disagreement. The evaluation report stage produces a document overviewing strengths and weaknesses with recommendations for future implementation. The final stage consists of followup activities to implement the recommendations. (Author/CTM)

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CO-OPERATIVE EVALUATION OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Presented at the First Congress on Education June 20, 1978, Harbour Castle Hilton, Toronto, Canada

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In 1969, the Ontario Department of Education (now the Ministry of Education) reduced significantly its direct involvement in the supervision of the provinces classrooms and schools. Except in the case of small isolated boards and certain special circumstances, supervision in 1969 became a direct responsibility of school boards and districts.

By 1971, there was a growing awareness among members of the ministry, boards of education, and the teaching profession of the need for an adequate and comprehensive method of assessing the performance of educational systems.

In December of 1971, the Deputy-Minister of Education invited the Ontario Teachers Federation, the Ontario School Trustees Council, and the Ontario Association for Educational Administrative Officials to meet with representatives of the Ministry of Education to identify a set of basic principles on which an evaluation model would be based.

The evaluation model that has subsequently been developed and tested reflects the following seven principles as suggested by this diverse group:

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1) Involvement — Anyone who may be affected by it should be integrally involved in the evaluation process.

2) Communications — In order that maximum benefits may be derived from the evaluation process, a sincere effort must be made to maintain effective communication among all the participants.

3) Self-evaluation — There is a basic human desire to improve personal performance. Sound evaluation will recognize this inheritant need.

4) Co-operation — Since all members of the community, at whatever levels of authority and function, are concerned with the quality of education, all such levels should be involved in the evaluation process.

5) Comprehensiveness — An evaluation model must recognize all of the related components that operate within the school system, and thus have an effect on the attainment of its goals.

6) Continuity — An evaluation process must be continuous so that information, assessment, and decisions can emerge at any stage.

7) Coordination — To be effective, all the components of the evaluation model must be valid, well planned, and systematically implemented.

Within these principles, the overall objectives of the evaluation activity was to provide reliable information whereby at both provincial and local levels, educational achievements could be perceived more clearly, and developmental decision making facilitated and accountability needs met.

The model as it has developed since 1971, provides a review of the overall functioning of the school system including the business operation as well as individual instructional programs. The model includes the evaluation of the four components of a school system:

a) people;

b) purposes;

c) programs;

d) products.

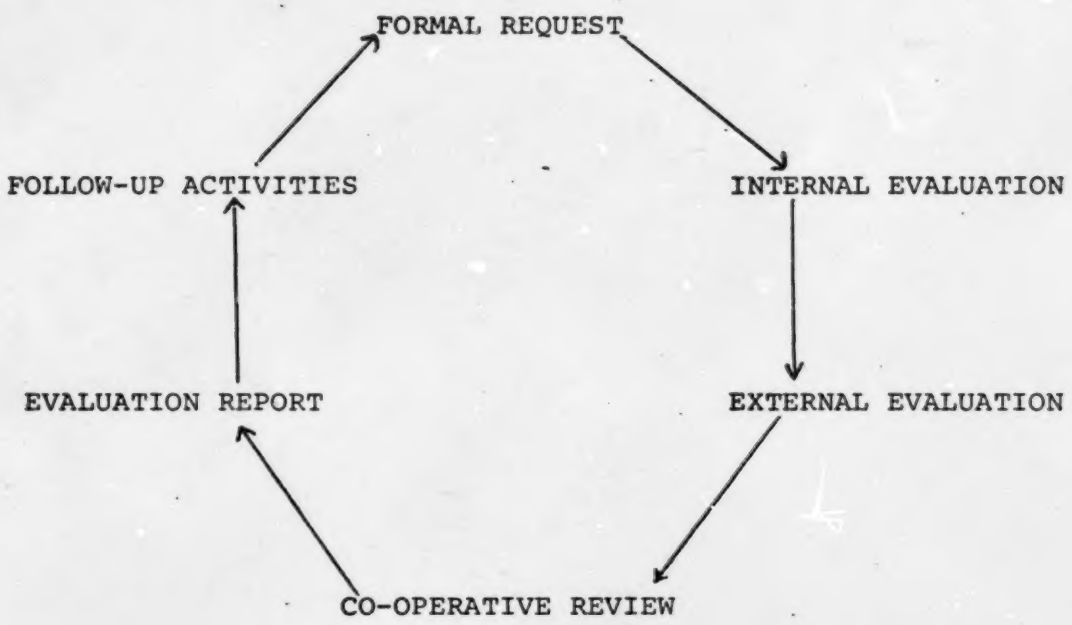
All members of the system are given an opportunity to participate in the evaluation: trustees, the chief executive officer, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, support staff and members of the community at large.

The importance of the system focus and the involvement of all members was supported by the Minister of Education, the Honourable Thomas L. Wells, in an address to the Ontario School Trustees Council in February 1972.

> "There is, in my opinion, considerable merit in a total systems approach to this problem. That is, any school system embarking on a comprehensive review program should be prepared to assess a current situation, what is required, and the reasons for the difference between the two. Education can be viewed as a system with various components; teaching and instruction, management and administration, policy making and communication, facilities and support, community and learners. It should be possible to look at these components from a number of vantage points; for instance the teacher, the school staff, the supervisory staff and the school board can examine those components from their respective areas of responsibility."

The cooperative evaluation model has six stages as follows:

1) initiation and formal request;
2) internal evaluation;
3) external evaluation;
4) co-operative review;
5) evaluation report;
6) follow-up activities.



Each of the stages will be discussed in greater detail.

Stage 1 - Initiation and formal request

There are four basic steps in the initiation stage: inquiry, exploration, tentative commitment and letter of agreement.

The entire process is a voluntary one from the point of view of the school board and in most cases the chief executive officer initiates a contact with the Ministry asking for more information. Typically a Ministry representative, usually from the regional office, meets with the board, administrative officials, and other groups within the system to discuss the nature of the evaluation model and to ensure that the goals and the ministry's involvement are fully understood. The ministry is concerned with setting out as much information about the model as possible

and the board is concerned at this point with determining its system awareness and the readiness and willingness of the entire personnel group to participate in this evaluation activity.

Experience todate indicates that this phase of the initiation stage is very critical to any success achieved ultimately by the application of the model. Constructive times spent on the initiation stage results in reduced misconception about the nature of the model. When the appropriate system wide discussion has been completed, the board makes its decision to proceed or to refrain. If the decision is to proceed, the board passes a tentative resolution and requests the ministry's participation in a co-operative evaluation project. Formal letters of understanding are then exchanged.

The Ministry of Education appoints a project co-ordinator who will oversee the entire project. The Board of Education appoints a chairman for the internal evaluation committee who will have responsibility to lead and assume responsibility for the self-evaluation of the school system.

Stage 2 - Internal evaluation

This stage is designed and conducted by the internal chairman and an internal evaluation committee usually

selected to contain representation from the formal organizations within the system: teachers, supervisory officers, trustees, parents and students. During the process of this self-evaluation, the methodology should collect together the perceptions of all the constituents of the school system as to the strengths of the system, the weaknesses of the system and the recommendations for supporting the strengths and eliminating the weaknesses.

In order to assist the internal team, the Ministry of Education has developed a set of instruments which can be used to solicit this information. These instruments are designed to cover three general areas:

1) System review guides

The system review guides are designed for wide distribution within the system to sample populations of teachers, students and parents. The results furnish the internal committee with descriptive indicators as to the state of the education system at large — how the system feels about itself as an educational entreprise and about education generally. The guides focus on people's priorities for the system and their opinions as to how well the system is meeting its stated objectives.

2) Role review guides

The role review guides gathered data reflecting role perceptions from teachers, administrators and trustees. The design for each instrument challenges the respondents to reflect upon his role and to express judgment as to how the individual role is functioning as part of the larger role within the system. Each item calls not only for self-evaluation, but also for some perception of the role at large as practiced in the system. The following are the major headings contained within the role review guides:

Trustees

A. Evaluation of the board as an operating corporate body.
   1. Meetings - structure and tenor
   2. Development of trustees
   3. Relationships - Chief Executive Officer
   4. Community Communications
B. Evaluation of the board as the authoritative agent in the development, establishment and dissemination of policy.
C. Evaluation of the board as a management authority.
   1. The management of personnel
   2. The management of purchasing
   3. The management of the budget
   4. The management of program
   5. The management of facilities

Administrators

A. Supervision of instruction
B. Supervision of program
C. Curriculum development
D. Budget
E. Policy and procedures
F. Public Relations

Teachers

A. Supervision
B. Curriculum
C. Facilities
D. Professional development
E. Student evaluation
F. Aims and objectives
G. School Management

3) Program review guides

The program review guides solicit opinion from teachers about the quality of the specific programs within the school system in contrast with the general quality indicators found in the system and role review guides. These program review guides cover areas such as primary-junior education, intermediate-senior education, guidance, special education, mathematics, English, science, school facilities, physical and health education, etc. Each of the guides is organized under seven different headings as follows:

a) objectives;

b) course design;

c) teaching strategies;

d) resources and materials;

f) facilities;

g) staff development;

h) evaluation processes and procedures.

The data assembled by the use of the three sets of review guides provides the internal evaluation committee with initial information which can be reviewed for possible inclusion in the internal evaluation report. More importantly, it provides direction for the internal evaluation exercise which can be followed up with group discussion, interviews, further questionnaires, documentary research and meetings in order to confirm or

refine the data findings. It is the personalized exchange using these other data gathering techniques which are of the greatest value in validating the initial material, and stimulating continuing interest in the evaluation project as a whole. It is the intent in conducting this exercise that all personnel within the system will have the opportunity to contribute their opinions and attitudes toward the self-evaluation component of the evaluation.

While the instrumentation available from the Ministry provides structure and a sound foundation to the internal teams evaluation activities, it does not discourage the use of other data gathering strategies which the internal team feels will complement the information gathered from the ministry's instrument package.

To this point in time, none of the 18 projects which have been undertaken have included measures of student achievement as part of the evaluation exercise. The lack of product or student measures is deliberate and reflects an awareness of a historical and philosophical point of view relevant to mass product assessment approaches. This does not deny that many school boards do have considerable student achievement data on hand but in all cases they have been reluctant to include it in the evaluation process.

The outcome of this particular stage in the evaluation process is an internal evaluation report which is available to the system for the next stage of the model.

Stage 3 - External evaluation

Towards the end of the internal evaluation stage, the project co-ordinator recruites an external evaluation team made up of ministry staff and personnel from school boards. The project co-ordinator in selecting the members of the external group will attempt to secure expertise relevant to the concerns expressed by the internal evaluation committee. This team varies in size from 5 members to 20 members depending on the size of the board being evaluated.

The external team is on the site for up to ten days and attempts, using its own methods, to assess the validity of the conclusions drawn by the internal team. In this sense, the external team members act as auditors of the internal report. More specifically, the functions of the external team are:

1) identifying the conclusions, strengths and/or weaknesses in the internal report related to the school system;
2) collecting independent information about these conclusions, strengths and/or weaknesses in order to determine their validity;

3) determining the reasons for the conclusions, strengths and/or weaknesses identified in the report;
4) identifying feasible solutions to the identified problems.

In a sense, the report is written from a discrepancy point of view in that it indicates discrepancies between the external team's observations and the information contained in the internal report.

Stage 4 - Co-operative review meeting

After the internal evaluation committee has carefully examined the external report, the project co-ordinator calls together the internal and external committee chairmen and representatives from each team forum a co-operative review meeting.

The co-operative review meeting is a reporting for where the data from the internal phase and the data gathered by the external evaluation team are brought together. The members of the internal evaluation committee have an opportunity to review the findings of the external team, to test the findings against their own experiences and the data from the internal stage, and to challenge the external evaluation team. The ultimate goal of this meeting is an in-depth understanding of all areas of agreement and disagreement between the internal and external evaluation reports.

Stage 5 - Evaluation report

The compilation of the final report is the responsibility of the project co-ordinator. The final report should contain the complete reports of the internal and external evaluation stages , a summary of recommendations, the minutes of the co-operative review meeting and finally, the recommendations of the project co-ordinator for follow-up activities. This evaluation report is a system awareness document and will provide a complete overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the school system with recommendations and suggestions for implementation. In most cases, the alternatives presented represent the best advice possible because of the quality of personnel that have been involved in the entire process.

The evaluation report is presented by the project co-ordinator to the Board and the Ministry and becomes the property of the board. Frequently, the actual presentation is made in a number of sessions— formal presentation, committee study and then full board review in a special meeting. In some projects, the report is released to the entire system and the press at the time of this presentation. In some of the projects, the actual release has been delayed until the board has had time to develop strategies for implementing the recommendations.

Stage 6 - Follow-up activities

Implementation of the recommendations in the report is a process which includes clarification and understanding of the final report and the commitment on the part of the school authorities towards particular change activities which will lead eventually to those activities becoming an integral part of the school system and its operation. The high degree of involvement of personnel and parents in the co-operative evaluation generates a significant degree of expectation and anticipation regarding the report.

The project co-ordinator maintains his contact with the project in order that he can assist the board in the follow-up activities. The implementation process often takes two to three years of fairly intensive study and application and a continual reassessment of the validity of the recommendations as they are presented for decision making.

The words of one of the directors of education for one of the pilot projects summarizes the value that he sees to the entire process:

> "The professional development value to our staff was tremendous. All agreed that it was a useful worthwhile undertaking if the follow-up is as well done. Excellent public relations in the jurisdiction was generated and is still going on. People in the system really saw it as a system for the first time. Parochialism disappeared in our staff. People now believe in the operation and see themselves as part of a total educational process."

In summary, it is reasonably certain that educators in the late 1970's and 1980's will be obliged to demonstrate visibly and accurately the results of their efforts to the general public. The co-operative evaluation model, by stressing involvement and a systems approach is not focussing on the punitive aspects of evaluation but rather on promoting quality control within the local jurisdiction. This model has demonstrated its potential for joining accountability with progressive development at the local level.

Since 1973, eighteen boards have voluntarily undertaken co-operative review of their system and are in various stages of the model. The variations of the implementation strategy of each project reflect the flexible nature of the model which has continuously reflected the advice and input from the Ontario educational community without sacrificing its sound theoretical basis.